

Repentance – “But I’m not sorry”

- Reasons we don’t feel repentant
 - What can we do about it?
 - We read often about tears of repentance... is that still possible? How can I acquire it? What are the benefits of this virtue?
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Confessions of St Augustine

Tears of Hannah – mother of Samuel

Psalm6

Song of Songs

Pharisee and Publican

Prodigal son

The 2 sons

Jonah

REPENTANCE

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The Concept of Repentance

The importance of repentance is undisputed by all but repentance in the Orthodox Church is totally different from repentance in other Churches with respect to its definition, efficacy, practice and necessity for salvation.

(1) Repentance is a sacrament

In the Orthodox concept, repentance is one of the Church's Seven Sacraments. It is called the Sacrament of Repentance. However, the Protestant groups, in not believing in the Church Sacraments, do not consider repentance a holy Mystery. Therefore, there is a difference between repentance and the Sacrament of Repentance. This difference has its consequences.

(2) Repentance and confession

In the Orthodox concept, confessing one's sins represents a main part of the Sacrament of Repentance. By confessing, we mean confessing to a priest: *“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy”* (Prov.28: 13).

People in the Old Testament practised confession. It is written: *“And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he has sinned”* (Lev.5: 5,6).

The Holy Bible is full of examples of confessions. Confession continued until the last prophet of the Old Testament or the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the time of John the Baptist, when *“Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptised by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins”* (Matt.3: 5,6).

In the New Testament also people practised confession. It is written: *“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds”* (Acts 19:18), and *“Confess your trespasses to one another”* (Jas.5: 16).

However, the Protestant groups do not believe in confession and do not consider it part of repentance.

(3) Repentance and the Church

It is true that repentance is a work within the heart involving regret and a resolution to abandon the sin in addition to the actual abandoning of sin practically and from the heart. Yet repentance is completed inside the Church by confession and the absolution. The sinner is to confess his sins and the priest is to read the absolution and give the forgiveness, following the Lord's words: *“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”* (John.20: 22,23).

This is also followed by the guidance that the penitent receives from his spiritual father in order to remain in his penitence. As for our Protestant brethren, they present repentance as being completely independent from the Church. It is an individual

act, with no relation with priesthood because they do not believe in priesthood but they believe in the direct relationship with God.

Regarding this point, our Protestant brethren are divided into two groups:

(a) A group which openly rejects confession and priesthood. This is the weaker group because it is so open that those who are steadfast in their belief will be aware of it. Also the notions of this group are clear and can be replied to.

(b) The second group does not speak against confession or priesthood or the Eucharist, but its followers try to make people forget these sacraments by not talking about them and by presenting alternatives. For example, they say: "You are in need of repentance and in need to return to God. Go and cast yourself at God's feet; leave your sins to Him to erase by His blood and immediately you will come out justified as if you had not sinned before. He washes you and you will become whiter than snow." They do not speak about the importance of confession or the absolution or the Eucharist; they leave them out to make people forget about them. At the same time, they use spiritual words and thus deceive many naive people. This is an obscure way and it is our duty to reveal it to people.

(4) Repentance and salvation

Many of our Protestant brethren try to separate repentance from the subject of salvation. When they concentrate on Christ's Blood, they say to people: "You are saved by the Blood of Christ and not by repentance. Repentance is one of the deeds and you cannot be saved by deeds."

We do not deny that salvation is completed by the Blood of Christ. But there is no salvation without repentance. The Lord Jesus Christ says: "...unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Lk.13: 3).

Repentance is necessary for salvation because nobody is without sin. As long as there is sin, then there is punishment for sin, and the wages of sin is death. There is no salvation from that death except through repentance. Repentance makes us worthy of Christ's Blood; "*unless you repent you will all likewise perish.*"

(5) Repentance and the work of Grace

Many Protestant groups hold that repentance is one of the works of Grace and all man's strivings are void. It is sufficient that man casts himself at the feet of Christ to save him from his sins. The Orthodox doctrine holds that the whole spiritual life of man is a fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit supports but man should strive. If man does not strive the Apostle will reproach him, saying: "*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin*" (Heb. 12: 4).

The Holy Bible portrays the spiritual life as a struggle which needs the whole armour of God: "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Eph.6: 12). This war undoubtedly needs man to struggle and win. This fight is what the Lord Jesus Christ meant in His message to the angels of the seven churches when He said: "*To him who overcomes I will give...*" (Rev.2: 17). Grace does not do all the work, otherwise God would not have said: "*Return to Me... and I will return to you*" (Zech.1: 3).

(6) Repentance and experiences

Our Protestant brethren consider repentance an experience, and encourage repentant to inform people of their experiences. So you hear from them the expression: "I was so and so, and now I have become so and so". The repentant continues to recount his previous sins in front of everybody without shame, covering his sins with the grace he has now attained. If he keeps silent, he will be asked: "Tell us about your experiences." but Orthodoxy forbids these narrations as they mainly involve boasting of the change, which the repentant has reached.

(7) Repentance, joy and contrition

Orthodoxy emphasises the contrition of the soul of the repentant. He should remember before God the sins he committed, drenching his bed with his tears as David the Prophet did. Protestantism, however, pushes people towards joy, which involves no contrition. In most cases, the repentant directly becomes a minister, which gives him no chance to grieve in his inner self over his sins. The reason the Protestants give for this attitude is that a repentant should rejoice over his salvation. In replying to this point, we put before them the incident of the people of Israel eating the Passover lamb: In the midst of their joy for their salvation from the sword of the Angel of Death, they had to eat the Passover lamb with bitter herbs, according to the Lord's command (Ex.12: 8). The bitter herbs reminded them of their sins because of which they were enslaved to Pharaoh. It is true that eating the Passover lamb reminded them of salvation and its joy but the lamb had to be eaten with bitter herbs.

What is the position of *bitter herbs* in repentance according to the Protestant concept? One of the Protestant books even attacked the phrase "Lord have mercy" which we say in our prayers! It also attacked all the phrases of contrition, condemning them to be against the joy of salvation.

(8) Repentance and newness of life

What we call in Orthodoxy 'repentance' is frequently called by our Protestant brethren 'newness of life', 'renewal' or 'salvation'. Some Protestants ask one another: "Have you been renewed? Have you been saved? Have you experienced newness of life?" And all they mean is the act of repentance; no more, no less. In the Orthodox concept, all these expressions: 'Renewal', 'newness of life' and 'salvation' are completed in the Sacrament of Baptism, but repentance is a process of change in man's way of life.

(9) Repentance precedes all other sacraments

The Sacrament of Repentance precedes the Sacrament of Baptism as St. Peter the Apostle says: *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptised”* (Acts 2: 38). It precedes the Sacrament of Eucharist, as our teacher St. Paul the Apostle says: *“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body”* (1Cor.11: 27-29). The Sacrament of Repentance also precedes the Sacrament of the Holy Unction. Our teacher James the Apostle says: *“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven”* (Jas.5: 14,15).

The same applies to the rest of the Sacraments because so long as the Sacraments are graces of the Holy Spirit then they should be prepared for by purifying the heart through repentance but since our brethren the Protestants do not believe in Sacraments nor in repentance as a Sacrament, these words are outside their concepts.

(10) Repentance, conduct and deeds

Our brethren the Protestants hold that the Christian life is not a life of conduct and deeds but a life of Grace and faith. In Orthodoxy, faith and Grace are important but nevertheless our Church says with the Forerunner: *“Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance”* (Matt.3: 8). Orthodoxy holds that conduct is an important matter necessary for salvation. If our Protestant brethren persist on the importance of Blood for man's purification, we put before them the saying of the Apostle John regarding the relation between conduct and the Blood of the Lord: *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son Cleanses us from all sin”* (1John.1: 7). Here, conduct is put as a condition. There is no cleansing by Blood without repentance; repentance is an essential condition.

3- Praying, fasting, and sacrifice offering:

Repentance, together with what attach to it, of change of the inner heart, and worship, is a personal thing that touches the life of a believer, and his hidden relationship with God. Yet, it is at the same time, a collective practice; as said by the prophet Samuel: *“Gather all Israel to Mizpah”* (1 Samuel 7: 5); and by the apostle Paul: *“If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it”* (1 Corinthians 12: 26); and by the evangelist Luke: *“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents”* (Luke 15: 10); as his repentance would support many on earth, and would motivate them to repent with him; while, with every fall and concealed looseness, we do wrong to the whole congregation. The heartily repentance also came to carry apparent actions:

- a- Putting away all the foreign gods (1 Samuel 7; 4).
- b- A collective gathering in Mizpah to worship with one spirit (1 Samuel 7: 4).
- c- The prophet Samuel prayed to God on their behalf (1 Samuel 7: 5).
- d- Drawing water and pouring it out before the Lord (1 Samuel 7: 6).
- e- A collective fasting (1 Samuel 7: 6).
- f- A confession of sins to God before the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 7: 6).
- g- A need for a burnt offering to reconcile with God (1 Samuel 7: 9).

The prophet Samuel requested from the people to gather together in ‘Mizpah’, which means (Watching tower) -- a city in Benjamin (Joshua 18: 26), thought to be ‘Tel-El-Nasbeh’, excavated by Bade in the years 1926 -- 1935, 8 miles north of Jerusalem; while some still believe it to be the village of ‘Prophet Samuel’, located 2935 feet above the sea level on the highest summits near Jerusalem; and 5 miles north-west of Jerusalem.

3- Repentance of David:

The prophet David entered into his depths to discover his weaknesses, without giving himself any justifications. He felt that he erred with no excuse; and counted his sin, as not being against Uriah the Hittite, nor against Bethsheba, but as against God Himself. He did not hesitate, despite his position as a great king, prophet, judge, and a spiritual leader, to confess his sin to the Lord, before the prophet Nathan, saying: *“I have sinned against the Lord”* (2 Samuel 12: 13)

He felt that the sin inside him was extremely bitter, that he had to (vomit) it; and as St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian says: [Remember that the fulfillment of every lust is always followed by disgust and bitterness, as close companions]. David vomited the bitterness inside him, out of shame of himself and his transgression; and not because of his embarrassment to confess before Nathan. Nathan's response came to proclaim God's exalted love: *“The Lord also has put away your sin; You shall not die”* (2 Samuel 12: 13)

According to the statutes of the Law, he should have been put to death; Yet God spared him that punishment; By repentance, he would also enjoy salvation – through the Holy sacrifice -- So he would not die, but would enjoy the life that overcomes death.

Through that true repentance, the prophet David presented us with the “psalms of repentance”, like: Psalms 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143, crowned by Psalm 51, that we sing with every prayer, asking for God's mercies, through our true repentance.

+ Whomever you are, who sins, and hesitates to repent for your transgressions, listen to David's moans. It is not Nathan who is sent to you, but it is David himself. Listen to his cry-outs, and cry-out with him ! Listen to his moans, and moan with him ! Listen to him crying, and mix his tears with your tears ! Listen to him trying to correct himself, and rejoice with him ! If the sin was not put away from you, keep your hope for forgiveness ! When Nathan was sent to that man; Notice the humility of the king, who did not despise the words of advice given to him; and did not say: "How dare you speak to me, the king" ? The great king listened to a prophet; I wish the humble people Christ, listen to Him.

+ "*For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me*" (Psalm 51: 3)

His sin was not previously before him, but behind his back; He was not acknowledging his transgressions ... But the prophet Nathan was sent by God for this purpose: to take his sin from behind his back, and place it before his eyes; to see the verdict proclaimed against him; to open up the wound of his heart to heal it; He used for this the scalpel of his tongue. (St. Augustine)

+ David transgressed; Let us now see how he repented ... He cleansed his sin by humility, by contrition of heart and soul, by not falling again; by always remembering his sin; and by accepting all what happens to him. By contrite heart, he enjoyed the cleansing of his sin through repentance and confession. (St. John Chrysostom)

+ He got rid of the burden of his sin, through a complete confession -- of one sentence. (St. John Cassian)
Through God's love for his believers, He chastises them for the sake of their edification.

+ Do not think of God just as a Condemner; He is all goodness !.. Think of Him when He shows mercy ! Together with His firmness, put into consideration His compassion ! (Scholar Tertullian)

+ Chastisement of love, is for the sake of correction, and not for revenge. A prudent and a righteous man, like God, does not chastise man to pay back his evil, but to correct him, and as a warning to others. (St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)
God loves His children and in his love He allows for their chastisement, to let them realize how much He hates sin; He allowed for the death of the child who came as a fruit of David's sin (2 Samuel 12: 14); not because something that child had committed; but so that those around him -- especially the pagans -- would not assume that God is partial.

4- Death of the child of Bethsheba:

The Child got very sick; So David humiliated himself for his sake; and for feeling that his death is a sign of God's wrath on his parents. He pleaded with God for the child, fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground (2 Samuel 12: 16); and when the elders of the house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground, he would not, nor did he eat food with them.(2 Samuel 12: 17).

On the seventh day, the child died, and the servants of David were afraid to tell him, because of his grief. When David saw them whispering, he realized what happened; and when he knew from them that the child died, he arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes, and he went into the house of the Lord and worshipped. Then he went into his own house, and requested to eat. How marvelous was David's complete delivery to the will of God. He, at first, humiliated himself before God, seeking mercy; Yet, once the child died, he submitted to God's will and said: "*Now he is dead, why should I fast ? Can I bring him back again ? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me*" (2 Samuel 12: 23)
He anointed himself, as a sign of joy; St. John Chrysostom says: [It was the custom of people in the old days to anoint themselves when rejoicing, as noticed with David and Daniel (Daniel 10: 3). As much as David humiliated himself when his child was sick, he rejoiced when God chose to take him]; and [That is real wisdom ! That is love ! Whatever great is your love to your son, you will not love him as God does]. The heart that is open to heaven, does not fear death, but receives it with joy, as a 'set forth' toward Christ.

+ Do not fear death; as God prepared for you to rise up overcoming death !

+ Fix the fact of your departure in your heart, O man; Say to yourself all the time: "Behold, the messenger is at the door; Here he comes to me, why am I slothful ? ! My departure is everlasting; There, there is no return ! " Tonight, meditate in this; Tomorrow, meditate in it; And when it is time to go, greet him with Joy, saying: Come in peace; I knew that you are coming; so I did not neglect to do something to help me on my way. (St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)

Sacrament Of Repentance

Instituted by the Lord Jesus when He said to His pure disciples: "*Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matthew: 18:18), and after Resurrection

He said, *“As the Father has sent me, I also send you and when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”* (John 20: 21-22).

Repentance: the person coming to Communion must practice repentance and confession regularly with their confession father. The priest who is the Minister of the Sacrifice, can ask the person if he is not acquainted well with them, if they practice confession? If the person does, then the priest will give them the Communion, if they do not, the priest can forbid them until such time that they do confess. This is for the personal benefit of the person and the priest too, who keeps the commandment of Priesthood carefully, for as St. Paul says: *“Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread and drink of that Cup”* (1 Corinthians 11:24). Self-examination is all about being aware of ones sins and mistakes, and confessing them honestly, as St. John Chrysostom says: *“No one approaches idly or negligently, but let us approach with zeal and fervour and stay alert (ready as the judgment is prepare for those who share in an unworthy manner”*. True faith and pure repentance are the beginnings of life with Christ, as St. Paul says: *“The elementary principles of Christ, the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God”* (Hebrews 6:1).

Nineveh's Greatness in Repentance

When God described Nineveh as being the great city, He was not considering its ignorance and sin but He was looking with great joy at its profound repentance. Nineveh was quick in responding to God's word.

When Lot warned the Sodomites of the Lord's hot displeasure, they scorned him, and *“to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking”* (Gen. 19:14), whereas the Ninevites listened with utter seriousness to Jonah and responded quickly to his word, despite the respite of forty days which could have been taken for slackness and slothfulness. The word of the Lord was fast, bearing life, efficacious and sharper than a double-edged sword. In their immediate response, the Ninevites were much greater than the Jews who were contemporary to Christ the Lord, the incomparably greater than Jonah. Those Jews saw the Lord's numerous miracles and beheld His infinite spirituality, yet they did not believe and repent. The Lord reproved them by the Ninevites (Matt. 12:14).

The word of the Lord was prolific. It yielded an abundance of amazing fruits.

The first fruit of the Ninevites was faith: *“So the people of Nineveh believed God.”* The second fruit was the unfeigned contrition of heart; humiliating themselves before the Lord. Thus they put on sackcloth *“From the greatest to the least of them”*. And sackcloth is a rough material made of goats' hair; a sign of affliction, abstinence and rejection of worldly pleasures. Even the king of Nineveh himself took off his royal robe and covered himself with sackcloth, arose from his throne and sat in ashes.

The Lord looked at that debased city and smelt a pleasing aroma; for *“the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart- these, O God, You will not despise”* (Ps. 51:17). Truly how wonderful is this unique spectacle! A whole city is seen contrite in dust and ashes, debased in sackcloth, from the king to the infant. Even the livestock were covered with sackcloth!

The word of God also yielded fasting and prayer.

The city proclaimed a general fast for all. People abstained from eating and drinking, and even the beasts, herds and flocks did not eat or drink. People did not want to be occupied with feeding their flocks so that they could spare their time for worship and supplication to God. Thus they mingled their fasting with prayer and cried *“mightily to God”*.

The most important fruit of the Ninevites was repentance.

Repentance led them to faith because sin was an obstacle between them and God. The fruit of their repentance was their humiliation, fasting, wearing sackcloth and crying out to God. Their repentance was a sincere repentance in every meaning of the word: serious and from the heart, in which everyone turned *“from his evil way and from the violence that was in his hands.”*

By this repentance they deserved God's mercy. He pardoned and forgave them, received them and joined them to His own. In this respect the Holy Bible says: *“Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it”* (Jon. 3:10).

The Holy Bible did not say: *“When the Lord saw their fasting, prayer and affliction”*, but said: *“Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way”*. Therefore repentance was the reason for God's mercy on them. Their fasting, prayer and humiliation were but fruits of repentance. I would like here to pause for a while at a verse said of the repentance of Nineveh, that is: *“It repented at the preaching of Jonah”*.

THE DEPTH OF REPENTANCE

Many have repented and returned to the way they were because their repentance was not deep.

But those who deeply repented, they never returned to sin again.

Repentance was a crucial point in their lives, from which they gradually progressed to grow in the life of righteousness, until they reached high degrees of Christian perfection, like David the Prophet in his contrition and tears. And Augustine who became a monk and then a bishop who defended the Christian faith. He had very deep spiritual contemplation. Also Moses the Black, who grew in love and meekness and serving people and became one of the Desert Fathers. And Mary of Egypt who rose high in the life of seclusion and became a hermit and blessed St Zosima the priest.

Those who have sins which they repeat at every confession, they have not repented yet...

And those whose repentance does not include the feelings of contrition, remorse and unworthiness, they have no depth in their repentance, and how easy they go back to sin. Likewise, those who in their repentance, they hasten to the life of joy, before their repentance fully develops and bears fruit.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 51:10).

This point brings us to repentance and its relation with the heart...

True repentance is not just leaving sin in effect, but leaving sin from the heart, the heart no longer loves it. The perfection of repentance is hatred of sin. If man disliked sin, he will not return to it again, so his repentance becomes a dividing line between a life away from God and a new life that longs for God. One of the saints said, “Repentance is to exchange a desire for a desire, which means leaving the lust of the world and man’s whole desire becomes living with the Lord. The Lord said about repentance:

“Turn to me with all your heart” (Joel 2:12).

“So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God” (Joel 2:13). Repentance is a longing to return to God, hearing His voice, and the work of His grace in the heart. On the other hand, he who does not respond to His voice, is a hard hearted person. The Apostle says:

“If you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 3:8-15).

And he repeats it in (Heb 4:7). It is the same as said in the Psalm: *“Today, if you will hear his voice; do not harden your hearts” (Ps 95:7-8).* Then God looks at non-repentance through the rejecting heart, before the insurgent work. Therefore, when He leads us to repentance He promises us the change of this heart. And if changed, the behaviour changes accordingly. The Lord says:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you” (Ezek 36:26).

“...And take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezek 11:19)... He considers that repentance begins from the heart, and the non-contrite heart is a stony heart, a rocky heart, a hard heart, as Pharaoh’s heart.

His heart is with God

The Lord repeats the same in the Book of Jeremiah the Prophet, and says: *“Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart” (Jer. 24:7).*

The return of man means that the will of his heart unites with the will of God.

God works in his heart, and he returns with his heart to God. God says in the Book of Joel the Prophet: *“Turn to Me with all your heart” (Joel 2:12).* And in the Book of Ezekiel: *“Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit” (Ezek 18:31).* And about the outcome of this new heart, St Paul the Apostle says: *“...but by the renewing of your mind:.” (Rom 12:2).* If the heart changes from the inside, his thoughts change too. *“For out of the heart proceed evil thought” (Mt 15:19).* Thus, the heart must change.

The fault of many is that they assume repentance is just confessing the sins, and they keep a desirable sin in the heart.

Because of this sin that they love, they back away from their repentance and fall many times, as the heart is not wholly for God and they did not return to God with their whole hearts... and their minds have not been renewed as the thought is still clinging to sin, and so is the heart. ...Their repentance is from the outside and not from the inside. God looks inside and says: *“My son, give Me your heart”.* Ananias and Sapphira laid the money at the apostles feet but they did not put God in their hearts.... The love of money - even a part of it- was in their hearts (Acts 5:1-4).

Often we ask children to be modest in their clothes without planting modesty into their hearts!

Although, if God enters their hearts they will be entirely convinced by it, and then modesty in apparel and make up will automatically become natural without any outside pressure. We ought to rise above the level of visible works, to the heart feelings within.

There is a son who might obey his father because of fear or submission, while his heart is rebellious over his father’s orders.. A man might pay his tithes with uncomfortable heart; he paid from his pocket and not his heart... But the spiritual man,

when he gives, he gives from his heart, with content and cheer, according to the saying of the Bible: *“For God loves a cheerful giver”* (2 Cor 9:7).

A man might fast by his mouth but his heart is not turning away from such food, so he resorts to tricky means and ways to find vegetarian butter, cheese and chocolate. He also looks for the cooking method which makes the vegetarian food more appetizing !!. Where is the core of fasting here?

And what is its relation to the heart?

A man might prostrate (give a metanya) with his body while his heart did not bow like his head.

In his prostration, there is no essence of contrition, submission or repentance. Accordingly, when he apologizes to another with prostration, it is not acceptable... A man might confess his sins but his heart is not remorseful!. A man might stop talking by his tongue, but has much talk in his mind! *“A man might speak with humble words, but his heart is not modest. His words could be softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords”* (Ps 55:21). In all this, the Lord says: *“My son, give Me your heart”*.

The spiritual man gives the heart to God as the heart contains all feelings and spiritualities.

Take faith, for example: There is a big difference between the faithful by name, and the faithful from the depth of the heart, who shows his faith by all his works. (Jas 2:18)... The faithful who sees God before him all the time, and to him the existence of God is not a mere belief. It is a life which he lives and feels... The holy zeal is not just works or words but it comes out of the heart.

His heart is with God

Meekness, humbleness and other virtues are not mere external works. There is a big difference between the humble by tongue and the humble in heart, who is convinced within that he is a sinner and weak and if it was not for the grace of God which supports him, he could have fallen down like others...

Also, the heart is the source of dreams, suspicions, thoughts and doubts.... as well as the source of the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22).

For example: Love, joy and peace... They all come out of the heart... And long-suffering, kindness goodness and self-control... They also come out of the heart. Otherwise it will lose its meaning and the righteousness that is in it...

Goodness is not whitewashed tombs (Mt 23:27). But it is the goodness of the heart. Purity is not just escaping from sin, but it is the purity of the heart...

The spiritual man, in all the work he does, knows that God is looking at his heart, his intention and his objective.

Out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Mt 6:21). His only treasure is God.. All the time, he says to the Lord: *“ My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast”* (Ps 57:7). Even if he fell asleep, his soul says to God: *“I sleep, but my heart is awake”* (Song 5:2).

The spiritual man, his prayers come out of his heart.

And not like those about whom the Lord said: *“These people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me”* (Is 29:13) (Mt 15:8)... But his heart is in contact with God completely. He speaks and feels his being in the presence of God, and that he talks to God and says: *“My heart and tongue praise the Holy”* and repeats with David his saying:

“With my whole heart I have sought you” (Ps 119:10).

Even during Mass or Praise, “Tasbeha”, his prayer is not just a tune or words to repeat, but the feelings of a heart poured before God in contrition, in submission, in faith, in love, in understanding, in contemplation and in warmth. One of the twenty four elders would advance and take his prayers in his golden censor and ascends up.

Repentance and inner purity are necessary for Holy Communion.

We see the priest doing a number of things:

+ He and the deacons put on white vestments of service which are specially for celebrating the liturgy. They are a symbol of inner purity. It is like dressing the one who has been baptized in white clothes, symbolizing the clean and pure life which he received in the baptism, as he has put on Jesus Christ (Gal 3:27), and as the Lord says: *“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments ...”* (Rev 3:5). White also refers to the holy life in the eternal kingdom ... And it was said about the two angels of the Resurrection that each was *“clothed in a long white robe”* (Jn 20:12), (Mk 16:5) and (Mt 28:3)... It is a symbol of the holiness and purity of the angels. And so should be those who are serving the altar and will partake of the Holy Communion ... The white robes become an example for the rest of the congregation ...

Repentance or Just an Attempt

Someone who says that he has repented then goes back to sinning, then repents and goes back again... has not yet repented. This is not repentance but attempts at repentance. A person who is truly sorry for his sin is a person whose life has changed, who has left his sin with no going back, like Saint Augustine and St. Moses the Black. One of the Saints said: "I don't recall that the devils have ever made me fall into the same sin twice".

Repentance is essential as an attitude on your part so that you may benefit from the Blood of the Lord Christ.

The Lord Himself says, "*Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish,*" (Luke 13:3).

Would you not then repent, but say "What avails is Christ's attitude towards me?" The foregoing words represent the Lord Christ's attitude towards those who do not repent: they will perish. His attitude towards you is that He wants to wipe out your sins with His Blood, provided that you repent, otherwise you will not benefit from the Lord Christ's Blood.

Does the sinner have a share in the Blood of Christ? Yes, provided that he repents. His attitude is thus important.

Read about the Saints of Repentance who were reconciled with God and who loved Him.

Mediate on the lives of the Saints and how God filled their hearts and how eager they became to please Him. Their stories will kindle within you a love for God and resurrect a love for goodness hidden in your heart. For there exists deep within everyone, however much he falls into sin, a longing for goodness. For God created man in His own image and likeness and evil is something extraneous which intrudes into the human character.

Whenever a person does something bad, he hears a voice inside him protesting against it and there comes a time when he can no longer silence this voice.

When he reads the biographies of the Saints, or sees an example of true virtue, his heart will easily be stirred from within and he will feel his inferiority. His eyes will be filled with tears and he will acknowledge that spiritual excellence is truly the highest thing of all, whether he aspires to it and progresses towards it or not. Any person who is enslaved to a particular desire, must have inside him something which protests against it, however much he tries to ignore it.

CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE

The sacrament of confession in the church is the sacrament of repentance. And without repentance, confession would not be a confession...

Repentance is an utter conviction from the heart that you have sinned. Repentance is to judge and convict yourself... Thus confession, is just an admittance of your own... condemnation... Then it is not the phrase, "I have sinned." or reciting your sins. The true confession starts in the heart, with one rejecting his own deeds and despising his behaviour. The one who condemns himself accepts any punishment that befalls him either from God or people, considering that he deserves it ... To grumble about the punishment proves that there has been no repentance... Repentance also includes trying your best to remedy the consequences resulting from sin... and retribute any injustice that occurred to others.

Therefore, Zacchaeus, in his repentance, stood and said to the Lord, "... *and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.*" (Luke 19:8) As for you, restore at least the same amount. Repentance without restoration is not sufficient...

Repentance needs a humble heart. The one who persists in his pride and dignity would not be able to repent. The one who always defends himself and justifies his deeds and words is not a repentant person. His pride stops him from repentance. The priest is supposed to say to the confessor, "May God absolve you," when he sees that the person has repented. The absolution is not to be said to the unrepentant. When one hears the phrase, "may God absolve you", it refers to the sins that this person has repented from... The confessor who is absolutely sure that he has sinned, and his conscience is harshly rebuking him, could change his behaviour and repent. On the other hand, the one who justifies himself could easily continue in his sins, as he does not feel their weight and they do not internally disturb him. How could one repent while he is not convinced that he is wrong!!

The first step is one's conviction that he has sinned. Therefore, confession is the second step, not the starting point. There is a big difference between a true confession and another without conviction.

REPENTANCE AND ITS PERFECTION

Repentance has levels and steps that one follows:

1. The first step is the feeling of being in a bad condition and the desire to change it. It is like what happened to the prodigal son, who came to himself and found that he is about to die of starvation. He found that the perfect solution is to return to his Father.

2. The second step is leaving sin and keeping away from all the ways that lead to it. What is meant by leaving sin is not to leave a particular sin but sin in general. At this point one starts to discover himself. **The more one grows in the spirit, the more he discovers new faults that he never realised before. Then he tries to eradicate them. He needs to pass various stages of purifying the self, till it returns to God's image.**

3. In a life of repentance, leaving sin must be permanent and firm, with no return, so was the repentance of the Saints. We never heard that Augustine returned to sin once more. The same with Moses the Black, Mary the Egyptian and Pelagia. Repentance, in the lives of all these Saints was a confirmed turn to God without returning to sin.

4. The perfection of repentance, as the Saints said, is not just leaving sin, but hating it.

The one who actually leaves sin, but continues longing for it in his heart, has not really repented. His heart has not yet repented. He is bound to have a relapse with action as well. Nevertheless, the heart is the basis. And the Lord says, "*My Son, give me your heart.*" (Prov. 23:26). Thus repentance must be from the heart and the heart becomes entirely for God.

5. Such a repentant person cannot sin again, because all his feelings and desires become opposed to sin and would not accept it. Besides, he would not need to strive to keep away from sin. He automatically stays away from it because of his hatred to it.

6. Real repentance must have fruits.

As the Bible says, "*Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance.*" (Matt. 3:8). The first of these fruits is love for God which possesses the heart, changes the life and bears fruits of righteousness.